



CONGRESSIONAL HEARING RESUME

106TH Congress

Date: 30 Sep 99

SUBJECT: Hearing on Anthrax Vaccine Immunization Program (AVIP)

**COMMITTEE: Subcommittee on Military Personnel, House Armed Services
Committee**

CHAIRMAN: The Honorable Steven Buyer

MEMBERS PRESENT (bold face):

REPUBLICANS

Steven Buyer, (R-IN)
Roscoe Bartlett, (R-MD)
J.C. Watts, (R-OK)
William Thornberry, (R-TX)
Lindsey Graham, (R-SC)
Jim Ryun, (R-KS)
Mary Bono (R-CA)
Joe Pitts, (R-PA)
Robin Hayes, (R-NC)
Steven Kuykendall, (R-OH)

DEMOCRATS

Neil Abercrombie, (D-HI)
Marty Meehan, (D-MA)
Patrick Kennedy, (D-RI)
Loretta Sanchez (D-CA)
Cynthia McKinney (D-GA)
Ellen Tauscher, (D-CA)
Mike Thompson, (D-CA)
John Larson, (D-CT)

Non Subcommittee Members attending included **Rep Jones, R-NC, Rep Gilman, R-NY, Rep Taylor, D-MS, and Rep Bateman, R-VA**

WITNESSES: See next page

Information contained in this resume was obtained during an open hearing. It will not be released outside of the Department of Defense (DOD) agencies until published hearing transcripts have been released by the Committee, and only to the extent it is in accord with published hearing procedures.

Prepared by: Maj Brad Oswalt Date: 30 Sep 1999 Ext: 697-9110

WITNESSES

Panel One

Dr John Hamre
Deputy Secretary of Defense

General Anthony Zinni, USMC
Commander, US Central Command

General John Keane, USA
Vice Chief of Staff

David Oliver
Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense
Acquisition and Technology

Lt Gen Ron Blanck, USA
Surgeon General of the Army

Panel Two

Lt Col Redmond Handy, USAFR (Retired)
Government and Business Consulting, Inc.

Major Jeffrey Jeffords, USAF (ANG)
164th Airlift Wing, Tennessee Air National Guard

MSgt William Colley, USAF (ANG)
137th Airlift Wing, Oklahoma Air National Guard

Col Mryon G. Ashcraft, USAF (ANG)
Chief of Staff, Ohio Air National Guard

Lieutenant (JG) Chris Rohrbach, USN
Assistant Officer in Charge, Bravo Platoon, Group 8, Little Creek, VA

Gunnery Sgt Larry Miyamoto, USMC
Chemical Biological Incident Response Force, Camp Lejeune, NC

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Subcommittee reviewed all aspects of the Anthrax Vaccine Immunization Program (AVIP) to include the threat, medical efficacy of the vaccine, acquisition issues associated with the sole source contractor, and concerns about personnel losses, especially in Guard and Reserve. OSD witnesses provided compelling testimony supporting all aspects of the AVIP and Members appeared generally supportive. Anti-anthrax witnesses continued to criticize the program, however, unlike previous hearings in the Government Reform Committee, Members questioned their anecdotal stories.

Chairman Buyer announced during the hearing that he did not see a reason to mark-up Rep Jones's bill making the AVIP voluntary. If this remains unchanged, the Jones bill will not be reported out of Committee and will die.

The hearing opened at 0905.

Chairman Buyer's Opening Remarks

- Highlighted many questions associated with the safety and efficacy of AVIP, BioPort's contract, DoD's tracking system, and special challenges associated with the Guard and Reserve

- Stated we need a "fact-based" review of the issue

Abercrombie: Noted that sarin gas attackers in the Japan subway case were recently sentenced to death--the threat is real

- Acknowledged problems with the program, but said this has been sensationalized

Rep Gilman:

- DoD has not been candid on this issue--more questions than answers

- Sees problems with consistency: State Dept is voluntary, DoD mandatory--Why?

Rep Jones: Pentagon must convince its personnel the vaccine is safe and effective; so far they've failed

PANEL ONE

Dr Hamre

- There are three options associated with exposure to weaponized anthrax: 1) you die, 2) put on your chem/bio gear and initiate massive anti-biotic shots, possibly survive or 3) get vaccinated and live

- Overall issue is a matter of trust and DoD's doing all it can to gain that trust

- Highlighted every witness in the DoD panel has been vaccinated

Gen Zinni:

- Significant threat from weapons of mass destruction, especially Iraq

- He requested acceleration of the program last year because the threat is so great

- Voluntary program won't work because too many critical skills could be lost in an attack

- 100% vaccination compliance at HQ CENTCOM

Lt Gen Blanck:

- 340K personnel have begun the immunization program with very few serious side effects
- Our forces will largely survive if attacked following immunization; without it they'll die
- Responded to Chairman Buyer that only 72 serious reactions have occurred to date out of 340K vaccinated personnel which FDA reports is very favorable compared to other vaccines
- Adverse reactions in small percentages of personnel are the cost we pay for the enormous benefits we gain from the anthrax vaccine

Mr Oliver:

- BioPort is the sole source for the anthrax vaccine which makes management more difficult, but no more so than sole source contracts for F-15, F-16s, and others
- We've invested \$6.7M in new equipment for the plant
- Newly renovated facility is expected to gain FDA approval in April 00

Gen Keane:

- Threat is real and it is morally imperative to vaccinate our troops
- Results of the AVIP to date have been overwhelmingly positive
- In response to Chairman Buyer question, stated there is little evidence of large-scale refusals or resignations

Some key comments, questions and answers:

- Chairman Buyer asked about the Government's investment in BioPort and Adm Crowe's involvement with the company. Mr Oliver responded that we spent \$6.7M on equipment and \$11.3M on facilities. BioPort and the DoD did not appreciate how much Michigan subsidized their operation prior to Michigan's sale of the operation to BioPort. Adm Crowe did not acquire any interest in BioPort prior the AVIP decision by DoD and there has not been any inappropriate action by Adm Crowe who owns approximately 11% of BioPort.

- Mr Gilman stated that GAO found there was no long term study done on the health effects of the vaccine. Lt Gen Blanck responded that no vaccines include long-term studies, however, the DoD has over 500 personnel at Ft Dietrich who have taken the vaccinations for many years with no long-term health effects.

- Mr Gilman asked if the vaccine works on all strains of anthrax and Lt Gen Blanck stated it was effective on all known forms of anthrax

- Mr Larson asked if Reserve and Guard pilots risked their airline careers by taking the vaccine. Lt Gen Blanck responded that DoD has contacted airlines and pilots do NOT risk airline careers by taking the vaccination. Mr Larson further asked why our allies don't mandate the vaccine and whether that shifted responsibilities to U.S. forces. Gen Zinni stated that we talk to our allies all of the time and they are beginning to look hard at this issue. Politics and religion impact decisions on the vaccine in other countries

- Chairman Buyer asked why Physicians for Social Responsibility are against the program? Lt Gen Blanck responded that he didn't believe they understood the magnitude of the threat and genuinely wanted additional testing

Panel Two

Lt Col Handy: Believes AVIP hurts recruiting efforts, stated the threat is overstated, and questioned adverse reaction statistics by DoD

Maj Jeffords: Called for a “time-out” since Guard and Reserve morale is threatened

Col Ashcraft: Stated that Ohio Air Guard has been successfully taking the vaccine when deploying to high-risk areas. More education is needed for some personnel, but overall compliance is going well

Lt JG Rohrbach: Stated that he wants all members of his SEAL team to take the vaccine--teamwork is critical

Gunnery Sgt Miyamoto: His shots have been administered appropriately and well documented. His senior leaders led by example and all took the vaccine

Some key comments, questions and answers:

- Mr Buyer commented that he had been briefed by DIA and was very comfortable that the threat was real

- Mr Jones countered that a recent classified GAO briefing led him to question the vaccine even more than before

- Mr Bartlett said we must balance risks--this is no different than other inoculations. The risk of not taking the vaccine is far greater than taking it. Time is running out for the U.S. We've been luck so far regarding biological weapons.

- Mr Buyer engaged Lt Col Handy regarding his allegations that Lt Gen Blanck's statistics regarding adverse reactions were not accurate.... "I'll ask Ron Blanck -- nobody's done more than Ron Blanck to help Gulf War veterans." He also commented that so many of these problems revolve around “pampered pilots” who seem to continuously complain.

- Mr Abercrombie said we've all learned that more consultation needs to be done on these types of issues in the future

Chairman Buyer: Closed by saying that he'll follow up with GAO to hear their perspectives and will meet with Lt Gen Blanck regarding adverse reactions. He reiterated that the threat is real and the vaccine is safe and effective.

The hearing was adjourned at 1445